

# New Jersey

## Language Arts Literacy

### Curriculum Framework

#### Chapter 1

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#### Implementation of the Core Curriculum Content Standards





# IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CORE CURRICULUM CONTENT STANDARDS

## Introduction

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Voices in the classroom resound when children use language to represent experience. For children, as for everyone, language is the primary instrument for making sense of the world and a primary way to connect with others. While language is a powerful means of communicating, it goes beyond the mere sharing of ideas and information. Language evokes histories, emotions, values, issues, knowledge, and inventions. It is what we share and what sets us apart, one from another.

The New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards for Language Arts Literacy capture language experiences all children need in order to grow intellectually, socially, and emotionally in classrooms across the curriculum. The standards are intended to promote students' capacities to construct meaning in any arena, with others as well as on their own. If students learn to read, write, speak, listen, and view critically, strategically, and creatively, and if they learn to use these arts individually and in groups, they will have the literacy skills they need to discover personal and shared meaning throughout their lives.

Concerns about how these standards represent language arts reveal two views about why language arts are essential learning. On the one hand, we want students to develop the skills they will need to bring to society as adults: critical thinking, problem solving, and creativity. On the other hand, we want students to discover the inner joy and self-illumination that come with reading great literature and communicating well in speech and writing, and to take these into their adult lives as well. The two views are complementary: As we strive for the goals of one, we can foster the goals of the other.

Underlying the standards for language arts literacy are four assumptions about language learning. First, language use is an active process of constructing meaning. Even the most quiet listener is actively working to link prior knowledge and understanding to what other people say. Second, language develops in a social context. While we use language in private activities, our use of language almost always relates to others. We are the active audience for those who create spoken, written, or visual texts; others listen to our thoughts and read our writing. Third, language ability increases in complexity if language is used in increasingly complex ways. Language learners must engage in texts and conversations that are rich in ideas and increasingly complex in the patterns of language they display. Finally, learners achieve language arts literacy not by adding skills one by one to their repertoire, but rather by using and exploring language in its many dimensions.

Although the standards define five language arts, these arts are not discrete skills or content. The language arts are interdependent processes that inform and enrich each other, more often than not merging in an integrated act of learning and knowing. The division of language arts into separate standards is merely a method that allows us to highlight the special features of each and to identify developmentally appropriate behaviors among language arts learners. The separation is not meant to suggest hierarchical order, or any linear or sequential approach to literacy instruction. The standards should be construed and applied as integrated aspects of teaching and learning. They are intended not as a curriculum guide, but as a catalyst for curriculum development and revision.



## Defining the Discipline

Language arts are the abilities that enable one to think logically and creatively; express ideas; understand and participate meaningfully in spoken, written, and nonverbal communications; formulate and answer questions; and search for, organize, evaluate, and apply information. The language arts are integrative, interactive ways of thinking that develop through speaking, listening, writing, reading, and viewing. Literacy is the ability to think as well as know how to access knowledge for thinking and communicating. Literacy is more than the development of a specific, predetermined set of skills in speaking, listening, writing, reading, and viewing. It is also recognizing one's own purposes for thinking and communicating (through print or nonprint, verbal or nonverbal means) and being able to use one's own resources to achieve those purposes.

## Planning for Strategic Educational Improvement

The 1990s have been characterized as a decade of movement toward identifying standards that lift expectations about students' development of skills and knowledge in content areas. There had been sporadic attempts to define standards across the nation and in New Jersey in the first half of the decade. By early 1995, New Jersey's Commissioner of Education had developed a strategic three-part plan outlining a systematic approach of defining standards, providing a framework containing curricular exemplars that translate the standards into classroom practice, and linking the standards and practice to statewide assessment. The first step in this plan called for the formation of a committee comprised of teachers, teacher educators, parents, and representatives of the professional organizations and business to identify standards for literacy necessary to function in the 21st century. The standards, elegant in their simplicity, address the five modes of language use: speaking, listening, writing, reading, and viewing. Each standard is elaborated by a descriptive statement and rigorous progress indicators for grades K–4, 5–8, and 9–12. The indicators reflect three perspectives on language and learning: developmentally appropriate activities for the students; developmentally appropriate instructional climates for learning; and specific literacy proficiencies to be demonstrated by the end of the benchmark years—grades 4, 8, and 12.

The standards working group recognized the unique demands posed by New Jersey's diverse population with more than 120 languages and extraordinarily divergent ethnic, geographic, and socioeconomic backgrounds represented in our schools. Moreover, New Jersey wrestles with a paradox regarding the governance of public education. Ours is a state with a 120-year-old constitutional guarantee that all children will receive a "Thorough and Efficient" education. However, during this same period, more than 600 local school districts have emerged, guided by a legislated mandate for local control over curriculum and instruction. Therefore, the committee recognized the need to provide standards that ensured a thorough and efficient language arts literacy education for all children but which did not impose a statewide curriculum preempting district decisions about local needs.

The second component of the strategic plan called for development of a framework that brings the standards and indicators to life within the context of a classroom. Through provision of model vignettes and activities as well as the educational rationale for them, the framework is a resource for local educators as they develop district curriculum and instructional plans.

The third component of the strategic plan called for linking assessment to the standards and indicators. With the Spring 1997 administration of the Elementary School Proficiency Assessment (ESPA), New Jersey linked kindergarten through fourth-grade literacy benchmarks to the assessment of students' language arts literacy proficiency. As of March 1998 and October 1998, the eighth- and eleventh-grade tests, respectively, will be linked to the appropriate grade-level benchmarks outlined by the standards and indicators.



## Developing the Framework

In November 1996, New Jersey's Department of Education (DOE) formed a partnership with New Jersey Network (NJN) to develop and disseminate a language arts literacy curriculum framework. With the support of NJN, the DOE convened 50 local district educators who represented a cross section of the state's diverse school population. Their first task was to define the range of content to be included in the framework. From the outset, the task force was divided into two groups, a writing team and a review team. Together, the two teams identified the following areas to be covered: an introductory chapter containing discussion of the document's purpose and use, curriculum alignment for classroom implementation, staff development, and the strengthening of home-school connections. Since the language arts literacy standards and indicators complement the cross-content workplace readiness standards by fostering the higher-order critical thinking skills necessary for 21st-century America, the document includes a separate chapter that outlines the standards and indicators in both areas. The two task force teams agreed to include vignettes that reflect an integrated approach to language arts literacy and exemplary instructional practices; illustrative activities addressing each indicator in developmentally appropriate ways at the elementary, middle, and secondary levels; and a philosophy of assessment with a discussion of appropriate assessment tools for teacher use. Additionally, the task force agreed to include a chapter with suggested adaptations for students with disabilities, students with limited English proficiency, and exceptionally able learners. As additional support, the framework plan also called for a glossary of terms and resources that include bibliographies, film lists, and websites.

The task force agreed to reconvene four times during the next year to review material and give further direction to the structure of the document. Between task force meetings, members of the writing team developed vignettes appropriate to three grade-level groupings and coded to identify which language arts literacy and workplace standards and indicators were being addressed. The task force also had agreed that the vignettes would contain a narrative of exemplary classroom instruction focusing on a cluster of language arts literacy and cross-content workplace readiness indicators, suggested assessment practices, and possible extension activities. The team also concurred that each vignette should contain annotations explaining the educational rationale for observed teacher and student behavior as well as questions that invite teacher reflections on the content of the vignettes.

The task force further agreed that criteria for reviewing vignettes for the three grade-level groupings should support the following: a wide range of instructional practices and materials that reflect the diversity of experiences in language arts literacy classrooms; quality literature where applicable; literacy experiences across the content areas; and multimodal learning activities suitable and/or adaptable for all student populations. The criteria for reviewing the activities should support the following: instructional practices, materials, and tasks illustrating a spiraling approach to each indicator across the three levels; high quality literature representing many of the cultures found in New Jersey as well as the traditional canon; cross-content learning when appropriate; habits of inquiry and hands-on learning activities that promote critical thinking and high-level student participation. The task force further agreed that the assessment chapter should represent the scope of current findings regarding assessment tools and practices, ranging from student-teacher observations to performance tasks to portfolios to testing.

A recurrent theme of task force discussions was the need to affirm an instructional model that includes demonstrations and modeling of the learning task, the gradual release of responsibility for learning to students through guided practice, continual coaching, provision of peer and teacher feedback, ongoing opportunities for students' reflective response, and ongoing opportunities for discussion that allows students and the teacher to monitor thinking and learning.

Between task force meetings, members of the writing team produced vignettes that were reviewed by other members of the task force for adherence to the specified criteria. All members of the task force designed indicator activities for one or more of the designated levels. Task force members also produced segments of the introductory, assessment, and resource sections of this document. The

task force leadership team reviewed the vignettes and activities to ensure that the document represented an appropriate range of experiences and a consistency in tone and language.

## Using the Framework

This framework invites several different approaches to its use. In an ideal world, readers would eventually read the entire document to get a sense of the sequence of developmental needs for students K–12 and the instructional tools available to educators. This practice is probably a necessity for language arts literacy supervisors responsible for student development across several grade levels. Given the volume of material contained in this document and the time constraints of an educator’s schedule, some teachers will need to begin by focusing on the level relevant to their instructional responsibilities but should be aware that the vignettes and activities at the other two levels contain valuable instructional ideas and practices that could be adapted. Teachers may also find it useful to approach the document by referring to specific standards and indicators that they plan to address with their students and therefore to focus on these vignettes (as identified in the matrices on pages 50–52) and on the relevant activities. Teachers with responsibility for students with disabilities, limited English proficiency, or exceptional abilities may want to focus initially on the treatment of these concerns in Chapter 7.

Those responsible for staff development should ensure that teachers become familiar not only with the standards for both language arts literacy and cross-content workplace readiness in Chapter 2, the instructional approach informed by the workplace standards in Chapter 3, the vignettes in Chapter 4, and activities in Chapter 5 but also with the approach to assessment in Chapter 6. In addition, supervisors and others charged with staff development will want to review the procedures for aligning the curriculum to the standards and indicators and devise a plan for staff development that promotes clear communication with parents and the community concerning changing instruction. Workshop trainers may want to design a series of workshops that address these issues based on the materials in this chapter and elsewhere in the document. However, the task force believes strongly that all educators should read these segments of the document.

Traditionally, every educator teaches to meet standards. Most often, the standards we are working to help our students meet are our own. This has its advantages: We are certain of our own standards, we are committed to them, and we are able to convey them to our students with sincerity. But there are disadvantages: We sometimes wonder whether we are teaching what should be taught; we sometimes encounter questions from our students, their parents, our colleagues, and the community about our standards; and we often feel as though we are left on our own to make difficult decisions.

The five standards for language arts literacy, developed by New Jersey educators for New Jersey educators, provide every teacher in the state of New Jersey with a shared set of standards for the teaching of language arts literacy. The five standards are broad in scope by necessity. Our state is home to a large and diverse population, and our educational needs vary since our public schools serve children whose ages range from five to eighteen. We need broad standards that inform, but do not direct, teachers at every grade level. While teachers throughout the state use a variety of instructional approaches and ascribe to differing educational philosophies, all of us agree that we teach language arts literacy because we want our students to speak, listen, write, read, and view with competence and confidence.





## Classroom Implementation

### Making a Professional Commitment

The standards describe the outcomes of solid language arts learning for students at each grade level, but they will not be met without consistent implementation for every child. The first step that each of us must take in order to help our students meet the standards is to develop a sense of certainty about the standards and commitment to them. Each of us must ask, “Why is this standard important for my students?” and “How can I foster student progress toward the standard?” Our students will benefit when they are taught each year by professionals who have a clear commitment to a shared set of standards.

### Aligning the Curriculum to the Standards and Progress Indicators

The second step to implementation is to read the standards and progress indicators for the purpose of taking inventory of the curriculum. Most teachers who have reviewed the standards see their own teaching described in them.

The first standard (3.1), “All students will speak for a variety of real purposes and audiences,” focuses our attention on the importance of students talking as they discuss literature, share writing, and solve problems. The traditional model of instruction, with the students often passive listeners, is no longer able to meet our students’ needs. The descriptive statement that follows Standard 3.1 indicates the wide variety of speaking opportunities that can and must be provided to all our students if they are to become proficient speakers. Learners speak in classrooms for many real purposes, often drawing on what they have heard, written, read, or viewed (progress indicator 1). Some of the speaking that students do in their classrooms is for formal purposes (progress indicators 5, 8, 13, 15, 16, 20, 21, and 22), but much of it is informal talk that allows students to explore and understand what they are learning (progress indicators 3, 4, 7, and 11). Furthermore, many of the indicators apply to both formal and informal speaking situations. Most classrooms today include cooperative learning activities and small-group settings that provide opportunities for students to practice and adjust their oral communication skills. Often, the speaking seems to be incidental, but it is precisely this use of speech that enables students to accomplish a variety of learning tasks: discussing literature, revising peer texts, and analyzing the use and meaning of the conventions of our language.

The second standard (3.2), “All students will listen actively in a variety of situations to information from a variety of sources,” suggests the many ways in which students can be active in their listening and the activities that help students learn through their listening. Very often, the activities that promote progress in speaking also promote progress in listening. As adults, when we talk about children who “don’t listen,” we are often referring to behaviors that indicate an inability to meet progress indicator 7, “Follow oral directions.” It is important to note that there are additional demonstrations of listening ability that we expect to see in our students—whether it concerns asking relevant questions after a speech, making an appropriate response after listening to a poem, or evaluating techniques in oral communications (progress indicators 8, 10, and 11). Today’s classrooms should provide many opportunities to work in cooperative, small-group activities that give students ample practice in becoming active listeners. While we cannot know from simple observation whether a student’s listening is active or passive, all of the progress indicators for Standard 3.2 suggest responses to the listening that are observable. Students’ demonstrations of their ability to listen actively will be evident in the ways that they use what they have heard to speak, write, read, and view.

Standard 3.3 states that “All students will write in clear, concise, organized language that varies in content and form for different audiences and purposes.” The descriptive statement that follows it indicates that we expect our students to become independent writers who are capable of planning, drafting, revising, editing, and presenting effective writing to others. The progress indicators for the writing standards demonstrate that, by the end of grade 4, New Jersey students are expected to be well on

their way to competent writing. Students require many and varied writing opportunities to become competent. These varied opportunities include informal purposes, such as writing to learn and to organize ideas, formulating personal and speculative responses to literature, and taking notes while listening to a lecture (progress indicators 2, 3, 4, and 7). Formal purposes for writing include the opportunity to publish revised and edited pieces, whether a literary text, technical materials, or a research paper (progress indicators 5, 16, and 19). We can readily observe whether or not our students are meeting the progress indicators for the writing standard by observing their writing behaviors and assessing their writing samples. Once again, we can see the opportunities for meeting multiple standards in a single lesson. Students who interview one another and write a description of their classmates to present orally to the class (a typical classroom activity in the beginning of the school year) will demonstrate their ability to meet progress indicators 6, 8, 9, 12, 14, and 17 from Standard 3.1, progress indicators 2, 3, 5, 6, 8, and 11 from Standard 3.2, and progress indicators 2, 3, 4, 7, and 11 for Standard 3.3.

The fourth standard (3.4), “All students will read a variety of materials and texts with comprehension and critical analysis,” indicates that New Jersey students will develop proficient reading behaviors that enable them to accomplish any reading task appropriate to their grade levels. The expectation is that by the time they graduate from grade 12, students will have the skills to read any text needed for work, further education, or aesthetic enjoyment. As beginning readers, students develop skills in the four cuing systems: graphophonemic (phonics and morphology), syntactic (sentence structure), semantic (meaning), and pragmatic (print concepts, such as word boundaries, arrangement of text, and illustrations or graphics). Most important, young readers learn that the purpose of reading is to construct meaning.

As students progress through the grades, they refine their reading strategies to become proficient readers capable of reading to think, to learn, to communicate, and to experience text aesthetically. The indicators for their literature studies promote a variety of literature by authors of different cultures as well as intensive study of genres, literary devices, and several works by a single author (progress indicators 5, 14, 17, and 31). As critical readers of content area texts and other nonfiction, students learn to read analytically, recognizing main ideas, supporting details, and typical text patterns of organization (progress indicators 11, 20, and 21). They also learn to distinguish fact from opinion, recognize propaganda and bias, and synthesize data from multiple sources (progress indicators 11, 19, and 25). To ensure that our students become competent readers capable of learning and enjoying texts throughout their lives, today’s classrooms should provide rich reading materials and opportunities to read for a variety of purposes.

Standard 3.5 states that, “All students will view, understand, and use nontextual visual information.” The descriptive statement that follows the fifth standard reminds us of the many kinds of print and graphic information that our students must be able to “read” and understand to become truly literate in the 1990s and beyond. Our students are growing up in a technological world that requires skilled use of visual information in the workplace, in the college media center, and in the home. Critical viewers learn to gather information from visual displays whether in texts, films, or technology. The progress indicators describe students’ abilities to use graphic information to enhance their understanding of text, to compare and contrast media sources, and to synthesize and articulate the information they have taken from these sources (progress indicators 4, 12, 14, and 16). As students progress, they become increasingly sophisticated in their ability to distinguish between factual and fictional representations, take notes on visual information from films, and evaluate media for credibility (progress indicators 9, 10, and 15). Students will also progress in their ability to gain information from technological sources, integrate multiple forms of media into a finished product, and solve problems using multimedia technology (progress indicators 2, 14, and 17). We can observe student success in viewing by their capacity to use the technologies available to them and the influence of their viewing experiences on their speaking, listening, writing, and reading.



As the last sentence reminds us, these five standards address behaviors that are not discrete. Instead, activities directed to proficiency in one aspect of literacy will always invite engagement in the other four. After making the standards and indicators an explicit focus of the curriculum, we need to guide students toward mastery of the skills specified by them.

## Translating the Standards into Professional Practice

When we see that most of our students need instruction to develop a literacy skill, we prepare a demonstration for the whole class and design guided-practice tasks, perhaps to be completed in small groups so that our students can assist and encourage one another. Close observation of our students provides the surest means for determining their progress towards the standards and indicators. As teachers, our observation of their products and behaviors and our reflection on the results of more formal instruments of assessment tell us what students know and are able to do and, therefore, what we need to teach and how to structure our teaching. We learn, for example, whether we need to engage in whole-class direct instruction, small-group coaching, or one-on-one conferencing. At times, the latter two may be targeted specifically to those few students who have not met the progress indicators.

Telling our students, “This is how I do it,” and showing them how to read aloud with meaning (3.1.10) or to edit writing for spelling (3.3.11) is the best way to teach them what they need to do to meet our expectations. Teacher demonstrations and think-alouds, “This is what I’m thinking while I’m reading this passage” (3.4.8), should always be followed by guided practice, “Now you try it.” We provide guidance by sitting with our students as they make their attempts so that we can assist them if they require help and encourage them if they require support. When we see that students are on their way to adequate performance of the task, we provide them other opportunities to practice it collaboratively first and then independently, and we observe them to assess their performances until we see indications of progress. What is important is that we recognize that simply asking our students to do over what they haven’t done well the first time can be effective only if they have a clear understanding of what went wrong the first time. This is seldom the case. Students generally need more specific instruction in order to improve their performances, and for most language arts literacy tasks, demonstration is the most direct way to provide that instruction.



The New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards for Language Arts Literacy offer us an opportunity to reflect on our teaching, and they provide guidance for setting priorities for instruction. Reflection on and use of the resources provided in the curriculum framework for language arts literacy will enable us to plan lessons grounded in the standards using materials from our own local curriculums.



## Staff Development

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Staff development is a crucial link between curriculum development and implementation of the standards. Regardless of the size of a district, all professional staff are responsible for the continual seeking of new and useful theory, knowledge, and practice, which in turn improve teaching and learning in the classroom. True professionalism is exemplified by the exchange of ideas about education within the professional staff. Districts, in turn, need to support this process by creating environments that foster staff development. There are a number of ways to provide the strong professional support that educators need.

By participating in professional organizations, such as the National Council of Teachers of English and the International Reading Association, teachers become more committed to their profession, join a network of dedicated professionals across the country, and benefit from the wealth of ideas for curriculum and instruction available from participating in the national, regional, and local conferences and workshops. Memberships in these organizations also allow teachers to access professional journals and books to replenish their knowledge of the field continually. Districts should support this development by providing necessary release time for teachers to attend meetings with their colleagues and to hear current theory and research in the field. Districts should also support professional development through graduate studies by providing financial incentives or, at the very least, release time for attendance. In return, districts should expect recipients to contribute their expertise through in-house workshops, participation in study groups, and assistance in implementing effective change.

In this time of fiscal constraints, educators are turning increasingly to outside sources of financial support. Administrators should provide teachers with information about and assistance with grant applications. Teachers can use grant monies to study, implement, and evaluate new instructional approaches; conduct action research; and publish their findings. In addition, in-district groups may form to study theory and practice or to review literature that might be incorporated into the curriculum. Reflective staff discussion must address the questions, “What works?” and “What doesn’t work?” Release time to plan, conduct, and evaluate these activities and to prepare periodic reports is an essential aspect of staff development.

Exchanges across schools and districts are another way of furthering staff development. Joint staff meetings provide a means of sharing knowledge and strategies. Collaborative projects enhance professional communications concerning educational instruction and programs, and class visitations and observations enlarge professionals’ vision of potential educational techniques.

Teachers require training in how to observe, that is, what to look for whether they are observing peers or their students. By videotaping classroom instruction and teacher-student and student-student instructions, teachers can later view the tape for a variety of reasons: to practice observational skills; to reflect on reasons for minute-by-minute instructional decisions and the impact of these decisions on student behavior and learning; and to reflect on their own teaching behaviors and expectations. When teachers engage in this self-assessment practice, they bring to consciousness their theoretical beliefs about teaching and learning and their assumptions about students; and they make explicit the impact of those beliefs upon practice. Finally, self-evaluation can enhance professional development by helping teachers to improve the content, the method, and the timing of their teaching to promote student learning.

Outside presenters can be just the right catalyst to begin dialogue and initiate change. Although one-day workshops can provide enthusiasm and motivation for change, their long-term impact is limited without follow-up. Instead, the systematic, regularly scheduled use of a consultant that includes presentations, in-class observations and demonstrations, and follow-up consultation with staff members promises more effective staff development and systemic improvement.

The *New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards* (May, 1996) is a guide for producing highly literate citizens for 21st-century New Jersey. The companion framework for language arts literacy offers models for teachers and students to move toward mastery of those standards. The framework translates the broad goals of the standards and indicators into visible teacher and student behaviors, illustrates how several standards and indicators can be integrated in a well-planned lesson or unit, and illuminates the spiral of teaching and learning experiences that guide students' development of proficiency across elementary, middle, and secondary grades.

The framework should be an integral part of staff development. Administrators need to develop a systematic plan for introducing staff to the contents of the framework. Each staff member needs to have a personal copy of this document, which includes the standards and progress indicators for both language arts literacy and cross-content workplace readiness. Simply distributing the framework, however, does not guarantee meaningful use. Instead, its contents should be introduced and examined in staff meetings where participants discuss the applicability of the vignettes and activities and the strategies they illustrate. Beyond discussion, staff members should be encouraged to plan for and incorporate the strategies of the vignettes and activities into classroom instruction and then to report back at subsequent meetings. Administrators should be looking for evidence that teachers' lessons reflect the practices found in the framework and should advise staff that this will be a focus in classroom observations. However, staff should be held responsible for incorporating these practices only if the district is providing the support needed to implement the framework.

Following are four brief scenarios, or vignettes, which demonstrate collegial interactions and strategies that support a climate for ongoing professional development. The annotations in the right-hand column call attention to factors that contribute to this climate for educators at all levels.

### Staff Development

**In summary, professional development for those already certified to teach should be designed to increase teacher skills and knowledge of effective instructional practices. Features associated with successful inservice include the following:**

- a coherent long-term plan
- a school environment that supports experimentation with multiple models of instruction and assessment
- opportunities for staff reflection and dialogue
- planning time for sharing of ideas, team building, and networking
- use of teacher and staff expertise in professional development
- access to other professional resources within the school or district
- use of outside experts for staff development



## First Scenario

In South Bridge Schools (a K–8 district), building principals are responsible for staff development. Before school began in September, Mr. Grabowski, principal of Franklin Elementary School, reviewed the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards for Language Arts Literacy. Knowing that many teachers in his building conduct “writing” lessons in which students spend a great deal of time completing workbook pages and fill-in-the-blank tests, he realized that a major component of staff development for this year must be retraining of the faculty to improve writing instruction.

Recognizing that district principals need to coordinate their efforts, he called Ms. Logan, his colleague. “Judy, I need a suggestion for an in-service workshop in October, and in looking over the content standards, I realize that an area we really need to address is helping students write for different audiences and purposes. My problem is...knowing where to start.”

“Well, Bill, last summer a couple of my teachers attended the New Jersey Writing Project, which is a three-week workshop on the writing process and a real eye-opener. That experience has really made a difference in how these teachers teach writing. I do not see as many worksheets. In fact, students are writing letters to local newspapers and to students in a school in Jefferson, Missouri. Most important, the students really seem to be internalizing writing skills such as editing because they have real reasons to use the skills.”

“Sounds good! May I borrow your trained teachers for our in-service days in October? I would like the teachers to introduce the writing process to my third- and fourth-grade staff. It would be great if your teachers could also bring samples of their students’ work to share as models.”

“Okay, but you need to tell your staff ahead of time that as participants, they will be writing for a major portion of the whole-day workshop....Remember, this is only a beginning. It should be followed with providing at least some of your teachers with the sustained experience of the New Jersey Writing Project next summer.”

“Thanks for the idea. I’m beginning to see some goals for a year-long focus on writing. Your teachers’ presentation in October will be the kickoff. During the rest of the year, I will invite a language arts consultant to work with my lead teachers. The consultant can help us work out a long-range plan. We’ll have release time during the year for the lead teachers and the language arts consultant to plan staff development programs. Meanwhile, I’ll be investigating the New Jersey Writing Project.”

“Okay, Bill. I’ll talk with my teachers and get back to you.”

“Thanks for your help, Judy.”

Administrators need to support the strategies that will enhance professional development.

Professionals should call upon colleagues for advice and support in solving educational problems.

Administrators need to support staff use of training resources outside the district.

Teachers of writing should be experienced and practicing writers themselves.

In-district workshops facilitate staff development and provide the beginning of long-term program improvement.



## Second Scenario

Brian and Maria are sitting in a “Reading and Writing across the Curriculum” workshop in their high school. Linda, the district’s language arts supervisor, has been conducting a series of such workshops for teachers in all disciplines. For the past year, Brian and Maria have had their science students keep learning logs as they read their textbooks and conduct science experiments.

Linda began this session by reminding participants that for part of the day’s meeting, they would share their experiences and reflections concerning reading and writing across the curriculum. Linda invited Brian to start the discussion.

“Maria and I have been keeping anecdotal records about what our students wrote in their learning logs last year.”

“Can you briefly remind us what your students did with their learning logs?” asked Linda.

Brian said, “Maria, why don’t you go first?”

“My students found that in order to record experiments accurately, they had to write information down right away. This meant they had to alternate between being an observer/recorder and an experimenter. Once they got the dual roles down, the entries gave them dramatic evidence about scientific methodology, hypothesis development, and validation.”

“My students also used learning logs as they read their textbooks,” said Brian. “For each reading assignment, students kept a two-column journal entry. On the left side, they quoted significant facts and phrases from the text. On the right side, they wrote questions or reactions to the material on the left. Often, the questions they raised in these journals became the focus of the next day’s class.”

Maria added, “Periodically, I’d ask students to exchange logs and write comments about their partners’ questions and reactions. You’d be surprised how often their responses help their partners to clarify their own thinking.”

“You know,” Linda commented, “you two have done so much work this year that you should consider using your anecdotal records as the basis for an article on writing and reading in the classroom. In fact, everyone’s done a great job this year. I want to remind you that all participants will be receiving three in-service credits for this series of workshops....Now, for the rest of today’s workshop, we are going to be looking at strategies to promote reading comprehension in the content areas. The first thing we will be looking at is common text structures or organizational patterns in each of the disciplines.”

A carefully organized sequence of workshops systematically builds professional understanding in an area of literacy.

Staff developers need to ensure that new strategies are being translated into classroom practices.

Learning about colleagues’ experiences with trying new strategies often encourages other teachers to try these strategies.

Districts need to support professional growth by providing incentives.

### Third Scenario

Following a seventh-grade language arts meeting, Chris, a provisional first-year teacher working with a mentor, Robin, asks to stay for a minute. “Robin, I need clarification on one of the terms you used at the meeting, *reader response*. What did you mean by that? I’m going to begin a poetry unit next week, and it sounds like that might be something I can use.”

Robin answered, “Oh, it works great for poetry. In fact, we just completed a poetry unit using the reader response approach, and the students really liked reading the poems.”

“Isn’t it just that students say whatever they want to about what they’ve read? How do you get anywhere that way?”

“The reader response approach encourages students to express their initial reactions to a text and make connections to their own lives. But that is not where it ends. In my class, students use stickies to mark passages that evoke a comment or prompt a question. Then we meet in groups of four or five to discuss our reactions. It’s really interesting to see how listening to others’ responses affects students’ understanding of the text.”

“What’s that got to do with literary analysis?” asked Chris.

“It’s a good beginning. Students get excited about the poem. They need that excitement to continue looking closely at it as they begin to critique the text. But reader response is a lot more complex than that because it builds on the transaction between the reader, the text, and the poem. We should really ask the administration to arrange some workshops on reader response and other approaches to literature. For starters, I know someone at the university who could do an in-service on the reader response approach. She really helped me.”

A supportive environment fosters an open and honest exchange of ideas among professionals.

Educators should be encouraged to share ideas and to learn from each other.

Educators should feel free to request training when they see the need.

#### Fourth Scenario

The chair of the Humanities Department at Williamstown High School called the department meeting to order. “This year,” he announced, “Central Office has asked us to suggest ways our department would like to spend the upcoming staff development in-service day.”

“Let’s do something different. We don’t need another outside speaker,” responded Joe.

“I agree,” added Janice. “Why don’t we do something that will help us address the new state Core Curriculum Content Standards yet be fun for us.”

“Unlikely,” Joe retorted.

“No, really, I’ve been thinking about the indicator that requires students to analyze how the works of a given period reflect historical events. This year, I want to incorporate more cultural history into my literature units. Maybe we can learn about periods of literary history in a different way.”

“Yes,” said Angela. “I’ve been thinking about developing units along the same line and adding an integrated arts component. What if we visited the Metropolitan Museum of Art to gather ideas for incorporating arts into our literature units? For example, when I’m teaching Romanticism in literature, I could show slides and postcards that reflect the Romantic movement in the visual arts.”

“And I could show how modern art at the beginning of the century broke with traditional forms just as modern writers did,” added Joe.

“I think we could write up a valid rationale for a staff development trip to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City,” offered Angela. “Not only would a study of art by historical period connect to an understanding of literary movements, it would also tie in with viewing a variety of media.”

“While we are there, we could get information on planning a trip for our students,” Janice suggested. “I’ll help pull it together. This is an in-service day I wouldn’t miss.”

Administrators need to involve teachers in planning staff development.

Nontraditional but valid methods of staff development engage teachers.

Enthusiastic colleagues often are powerful influences on each other.

Educators should be encouraged to integrate standards and indicators whenever possible.

## Preservice Education

New Jersey's universities and colleges have long been known for fostering excellence among those who educate our youth. Now these teacher training institutions are being called upon to incorporate the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards into their teacher training curriculum. Therefore, those who teach in or administer teacher training programs need to familiarize themselves with the standards for language arts literacy and this framework, which provides examples of excellent teaching and learning. Faculty should be sure that their preservice programs promote both content and methodology that are consonant with the new standards. Since most teacher educators stay abreast of current research and educational philosophy, much of what they teach already addresses the standards for literacy. Nevertheless, it is important to reexamine practices to ensure that teacher training programs equip future teachers with the skills and content they need to work with students in the 21st century.

Every teacher training program has a role to play in equipping teacher candidates with the skills and knowledge necessary to help children meet the language arts literacy standards. Although the primary audience for the literacy standards and this framework are those responsible for promoting language arts, every teacher is responsible for fostering students' literacy. Language arts literacy is necessary for success in all subject areas; thus, all teachers can and should develop their students' literacy regardless of the teacher's subject area specialty. Teacher certification programs should, therefore, include adequate teacher preparation in literacy development for every teacher candidate. There are a number of ways to provide a strong preservice program that will develop effective teacher candidates who are ready to promote their future students' language proficiency.

Faculties of teacher training institutions need to reexamine the content and methods used in the preservice classroom to be sure that the academic sequence and content are adequate for preparing teacher candidates to address the standards. This requires faculty and deans of teacher training institutions to stay abreast of current national and statewide issues that affect schools, students, and teachers; to participate in future review and revisions of the content standards; and to attend to discussions and decisions made by New Jersey's State Board of Education, the Commissioner of Education, and the State Legislature. In addition, preservice curriculum should rely on current, valid, and reliable research to guide instructional strategies taught to preservice teachers. Faculty and department chairs should routinely review course syllabi and materials used to be sure that the course content has been updated to reflect recent research. Teacher candidates should be exposed to a broad spectrum of materials presenting research-based content as well as methodology ranging from the latest teacher training videos to current examples of excellent teaching practice such as the New Jersey curriculum frameworks. Finally, preservice programs should be characterized by interactive teaching and learning that encourage critical thinking and problem solving.

Teachers learn to teach as they have been taught. If they are going to learn how to promote critical thinking and proficient language use in their classrooms, they must participate in these in their preservice education. This requires provision of adequate time within the professional program not only to discuss successful practices for instruction and assessment but also to actually employ these practices in the preservice classroom. In short, if the lecture is an inappropriate method at the elementary and secondary levels, it is also inappropriate in preservice education. Effective teacher training assures time for reflection and dialogue among faculty and teacher candidates.

Teacher educators have a responsibility to look beyond grade point averages and test scores to ensure that applicants to their program demonstrate the motivation, aptitude, and ability necessary for successful classroom teaching. This means that faculty members will interview applicants to explore their reasons for applying to the program and their goals for themselves as teachers. Moreover, faculty should continually assess candidates' potential for the classroom and counsel students who display limited understanding of effective instructional practices and attitudes. Motivated candidates value learning, enjoy constructing knowledge, and reveal a desire to foster these same values in succeeding

generations. This type of motivation should be nurtured throughout the program and grounded in the principles of child development, learning, and teaching. Successful graduates of teacher training programs will also have a broad and deep knowledge of their field.

When teachers move out of the preservice classroom and into initial fieldwork, they have their first encounter with local district classrooms and teachers. Too often, they find practices that are contradictory to those they have learned in their preservice classrooms. They observe teachers assigning seatwork or lecturing to the class for the entire class period. In the worst-case scenario, teacher candidates are confined to the back of the room to grade worksheets or are encouraged by the teacher to do a demonstration lesson following the teacher's format. These contradictions confuse teacher candidates, who are receiving mixed messages from the local district and their preservice classrooms. To avoid these problems, there must be an ongoing dialogue between teacher educators and local district educators concerning materials and methods. Local district teachers assigned to work with teacher candidates should espouse methods that complement those of the preservice program.

Positive student-teaching experiences allow candidates time to practice the principles of learning and teaching promoted in their preservice program. The classroom master teacher and the training institution supervisor should provide consistent opportunities for candidates to hone and refine their ability to teach in accord with the New Jersey standards. In addition, the master teacher and the training institution supervisor should be knowledgeable concerning the materials and methods to which the candidate has been exposed. In conferences with candidates, both the master teacher and the training institution supervisor should provide guidance and constructive feedback that help the candidate develop effective teaching techniques. In addition, both can provide the teacher candidate with ideas for lessons using this framework as a rich resource.

Just as portfolios have become an important mode of assessment at the elementary and secondary levels as well as part of college applications, they are used increasingly in teacher training institutions throughout the country, including colleges and universities in New Jersey. Accrediting agencies, such as NCATE and NASDTEC, encourage use of portfolios for assessment of teacher candidates. In addition to traditional types of assessments, such as ratings, observations, and transcripts, these portfolios also contain actual samples of the candidate's work: writing samples, reflective journal entries, and lesson plans. Portfolios may also include videotaped mini-lessons as well as longer teaching episodes in elementary and secondary classrooms. The contents of the portfolio afford local district administrators a broader view of job candidates by providing firsthand evidence of both the applicant's training and effectiveness in the classroom. Participation in developing the portfolio and periodic review of its contents also afford candidates opportunities to reflect on their growth as educators and to set future teaching goals.

New Jersey's *Core Curriculum Content Standards* and *Language Arts Literacy Curriculum Framework* should be an integral part of the preservice program. Local district educators should expect teacher training institutions to prepare teachers who are knowledgeable and effective in promoting the standards for literacy just as teacher educators should expect teacher candidates to encounter educational environments that provide resources to support excellent teaching practices and professional growth. This framework, which translates the broad goals of the standards and indicators into visible teacher and student behaviors, serves as a medium for clarifying expectations and thereby for informing an effective collaborative relationship between these two essential agencies of students' literacy development.





### **Preservice Education**

In summary, successful preservice experience and training for teacher certification feature the following:

- an academic sequence and content that prepare candidates to teach to the New Jersey standards for language arts literacy
- use of instructional strategies by teacher educators that model current findings from learning and teaching research and emphasize reflective practice
- comprehensive screening of applicants to teacher training programs for motivation, aptitude, and ability to become an effective educator
- fieldwork experiences that complement—not contradict—the philosophy and practices learned by candidates in their program
- selection of master teachers and supervisors who organize classrooms to provide learning opportunities that are consonant with the New Jersey standards for language arts literacy and with current research
- development of a portfolio for each teacher candidate that contains multiple assessment measures
- a focus on the integrated nature of learning and the need to foster language arts literacy across the content areas

## Home–School Connections

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If students are to master New Jersey’s Core Curriculum Content Standards for Language Arts Literacy, they need the direction, support, and guidance of their teachers and their parents to become proficient language users. Fortunately, the standards offer teachers three important opportunities to enhance home-school connections that are so much a part of student success in learning.

### Sharing Goals

Positive partnerships between parents and teachers increase student learning. As professionals, we must share with parents information about the standards and our educational goals for their children. Parents need to know what evidence to look for that indicates their children’s proficiency as speakers, listeners, writers, readers, and viewers. Parents also need information about techniques for encouraging and supporting their children as language users. Back-to-School Night, held early in the school year, affords a perfect opportunity to inform parents about the standards and to build a common goal. When we inform parents about the standards and the instructional plans for helping students meet those standards, we make it more likely that parents will share our educational goals for their children.

### Communicating with Parents

Positive partnerships require regular communication. Much of the communication we have with parents is one-way communication: We’re telling them. Often, this is necessary, and the newsletters, announcements, and student reports we share with parents are valuable forms of communication. However, no partnership is built on one-way communication. We need to develop two-way communication in which we listen to parents as well as inform them.

Parents need to understand that we know and care about their children. They also look to us to be competent and knowledgeable teachers. We can communicate all of this to parents by using a four-step plan. First, we should open any communication with parents by asking for their perceptions about their child as a learner. “Seek first to understand, then to be understood” is good guidance for communicating with parents. When we understand the differences in perceptions, then we can work together to clarify them and to make our views complementary. Through this process, we can develop shared goals for the student. Second, we describe to parents what we have observed about the child as a learner. The standards can be enormously helpful to us at this point because they provide us with the progress indicators that guide our observations of student learning and inform our assessment of students’ literacy processes and products. These observations and assessments yield specific information we can pass on to parents. We can speak about the strengths we see in our students’ work and provide examples as evidence, and we can talk about students’ needs and our plans for future instruction. Explaining to parents that the expectations we hold for their children are the expectations that teachers throughout the state hold for all students at this grade level communicates a shared goal.

In the third step, we advise parents of our instructional plans to address their child’s strengths and to help their child develop literacy skills and knowledge. We must have very specific plans of action for challenging and assisting our students. The standards and progress indicators provide the guidelines for designing a literacy program that will support our students’ continued development.

The fourth step in the plan is to tell parents how they can help their children. Again, very specific ideas tied directly to students’ skills and classroom literacy experiences offer the best hope that parents will provide support at home. Here again, the standards can be very helpful to us because each standard suggests activities that can be done at home to help children succeed in school.

## Promoting the Standards at Home

For Standard 3.1, “All students will speak for a variety of real purposes and audiences,” parents need to be made aware that their children will be required to develop and demonstrate proficiency in speaking in our classrooms. Teachers of Grades K–4 should inform parents of the Grade 4 ESPA Speaking Task. Parents can help their children at home by engaging in regular informal talk with their children and by listening to their children rehearse more formal talks. They can also engage their children in discussions of computer and television viewing experiences. Parents can help their children with both speaking and reading comprehension by asking their children to tell them the stories they are reading. They can help their children with speaking, reading aloud, and writing by asking their children to read aloud drafts of their writing or pieces from their journals. These simple at-home activities let parents know what children are doing in school and how they learn. Children gain in practicing literacy skills and in recognizing strong parental support.

Standard 3.2, “All students will listen actively in a variety of situations to information from a variety of sources,” is one that fits as well at home as it does at school. Parents can discuss what they hear on radio news and weather reports while driving with their children, engage their children in conversations about events of the day, ask their children to repeat directions they were given, and talk about the books they read aloud to their children. By informing parents of the importance of effective listening skills, teachers can encourage its practice at home.

Standard 3.3, “All students will write in clear, concise, organized language that varies in content and form for different audiences and purposes,” is also appropriately encouraged at home if done in positive ways. Parents can encourage letter, note, and list writing for personal purposes. They can help their children revise school writing by listening to the child read the piece and offering constructive feedback. They can help students use the editing strategies taught in the classroom by encouraging them to check the conventions of language, such as spelling and punctuation. Parents encourage their children’s writing simply by showing an interest in and appreciation for it, and reminding parents of this will help them respond to their children’s writing. Many teachers ask students to write letters to their parents about school events or topics studied in school. These assignments create strong home-school connections and provide students with a real, known audience for their writing.

Standard 3.4, “All students will read a variety of materials and texts with comprehension and critical analysis,” requires home involvement if it is to be met. Students simply cannot become proficient readers without regular, sustained practice, and the time they spend reading in school does not allow them enough reading practice. Teachers need to inform parents of the importance of reading and remind them of the public library’s value as a resource for good literature. Many parents do not realize that children who read at home for at least 20 minutes a day from accessible texts develop stronger reading skills than those who do not. Some parents also do not realize that reading appropriate literature to their children daily promotes children’s literacy skills. There are teachers who assign 20 minutes of reading as homework every night and send home a sheet that parents sign nightly to acknowledge that they have observed their children complete the assignment. This practice lets parents and students know how much teachers value the home-school connections.



Standard 3.5, “All students will view, understand, and use nontextual visual information,” can easily be addressed at home by parents who take the time to discuss with children the many visual media they both observe in their daily lives. When parents and children talk thoughtfully about television, movies, and other visual media, children become proficient users of nontextual information. Most parents are not aware that understanding and using visual information has become a critical skill for school and for life, and they may be missing valuable opportunities to help their children. Teachers need to inform parents that talking reflectively with children about pictures, cartoons, photos, and charts in books, newspapers, and magazines and about the wide variety of information available from nontext sources, such as computers and videos, develops children’s proficiency in visual literacy.

When teachers promote any of the language arts literacy standards as at-home activities, they promote strong home-school connections. Communications among parents, children, and teachers enhance students’ successful development of speaking, listening, writing, reading, and viewing skills. Parents deepen their commitment to their children’s educational success and make a strong contribution to the development of a skilled literate member of 21st-century America. They come to understand one another in ways that families who do not talk about ideas cannot. Reminding parents of the importance of creating shared experiences early in their children’s lives, and maintaining those experiences as their children get older, can often be difficult for teachers. However, when parents are informed that the home-school connections teachers promote will benefit their children and their family lives for reasons even more important than academic purposes, they can be convinced of the need to invest their often-limited time in helping their children develop language arts literacy.

